

## President Martha Saunders Under Oath

“Don’t count her out yet. There are plenty of low level colleges where she could rise again.”

[Name withheld](#)

If there is a chance that Martha Saunders can repeat her incompetence as an administrator at another college or university, its faculty and administrators should have a clear picture of her conduct as president of Southern Miss. This series provides a rare opportunity for the Southern Miss family, as well as potential employers, to consider Martha Saunders’ words, under oath. Click for [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

Martha Saunders didn't just squander millions of dollars in student and taxpayer money on an airplane, or hundreds of thousands decorating the Presidential mansion's bedroom, or hundreds of thousands on a misguided, illegal computer tablet give-away scheme, or at least a million in mismanagement on athletics that we know of, etc. She spent approximately two and a half million dollars trying and failing to fire me for opposing and exposing the questionable conduct of USM faculty and administrators.

It’s your money -- your millions and millions of dollars. Taxpayer and students’ money. If you care to understand just how incompetent Martha Saunders is, take a front row seat at her deposition. And where were Hank Bounds and Aubrey Lucas? With millions being spent to try to fire DePree, you can bet they knew. And, you don't have to take anyone's word. Observe it for yourself. Her deposition continues below:

### **Part 9**

Questions directed to President Martha Saunders at her deposition on April 12 and 13, 2010--Q is question; A is President Saunders’ answer.

Bear in mind as you read the following, President Saunders has already testified that she has no evidence that DePree ever recorded anyone at USM. Dr. DePree testified under oath that he had not recorded anyone at USM. Every person who wrote letter alleging that Dr. DePree had recorded them had admitted under oath that none of them had ever seen him record anything. It was all fabricated.

Q. What specific allegations, what does he [Interim Director Williams in August 2007] say Dr. Depree did?

A. Well, he says that Dr. Depree engaged in behaviors over several years.

Q. What are those behaviors?

A. Well, for example, the recording device.

Q. But we have no reason to believe that Dr. Depree ever recorded?

A. You didn't ask me what he said.

Q. No, I'm asking you what evidence you have. Well, let's talk about what he said. Do you have any evidence to support Dr. Williams' claims that Dr. Depree recorded?

A. I do not.

Q. And if he did not record that would not be conduct that constrained the functioning nature of the college of business?

A. If he did not record -- I think perception. I disagree there. I think perception that he was recorded would constrain.

Q. How is Dr. Depree responsible for somebody else's perception?

A. I don't know that he is.

Q. But he's been punished for it?

A. He's being held accountable.

Q. He's being held accountable for things for which you have no evidence?

A. Correct.

President Saunders' testimony becomes more and more bizarre as questions were asked and answered.

Let me see if I can get this part straight. Let's try a hypothetical. President Saunders, faculty, in their minds, believe you plagiarized your commencement speech. Accusations are made. Adopting your testimony, you should be held accountable. First, you deserve to be publicly pilloried. Then you should be cast out from the university community. Someone should take action to fire you.

The evidence against you? There is none! They testified under oath that they had no evidence that you plagiarized your last commencement speech. But they truly believe you did plagiarize it. Their perceptions, nevertheless, warrant your dismissal. You must be held accountable!

President Saunders' bizarre reasoning, which is too ridiculous to be accorded the status of *non sequitur*, out-Kafka Kafka.

## Part 10

Q. What did Dr. Depree allegedly do to make students and faculty fearful to go about their business?

A. Are you referring to Dr. Williams' letter or just in general?

Q. What evidence do you have period that Dr. Depree did anything to make faculty and students afraid to go with their usual business?

A. Well, I have the testimony of his colleagues in the department and a department chair and a dean.

Q. I thought you hadn't read their testimony.

A. Well, the letters.

Q. The letters are --

A. We're -- I'm using perhaps the wrong word.

Q. Have you made any efforts to confirm the allegations in those letters?

A. I appointed an ombudsman to try to sift through it all.

Q. Was he able to confirm these allegations?

A. He was not.

Around and around President Saunders goes: Accusations, ombudsman, no evidence, accusations, ombudsman, no evidence. But that didn't deter President Saunders from spending millions of dollars to punish a tenured full professor. What did the letters evidence? They evidenced an absolute intolerance of criticism, difficult questions or disagreement.

Future usmnews.net reports will serialize instances of speech that USM faculty and administrators refused to tolerate. The speech was peer reviewed and published. The reports should make for a constructive comparisons with the unfounded accusations on which President Saunders acted. The reports will provide evidence, from the mouths and records, of the faculty and administrators who found Dr. DePree's speech intolerable.

In other words, President Saunders chose to take action without a shred of evidence against Dr. DePree. Just as significantly, she refused to take action when confronted with overwhelming evidence of misconduct by his accusers.

Anyone who would like a copy of the transcript, please send an email to [marcdepree@gmail.com](mailto:marcdepree@gmail.com).) If you are offended by the usmnews.net series reporting Dr. Saunders' testimony, after you read the transcript, we believe you will wonder why the IHL hired her and continued to support her presidency.

## Part 11

Q. I believe you have the entire package of letters that was delivered to you. Would you tell me specifically what disruptive, intimidating and frightening behavior was described in these letters?

A. (Saunders looks at document.) One – and I'm just working my way through these.

Q. Please do.

A. In Dr. Steve Jackson's letter, he said that he had been told not to send emails on the USM network because Dr. Depree had access to all emails.

Q. Stop. How is that, to use your words, I believe, in paragraph five of your affidavit disruptive, intimidating and frightening behavior by Dr. Depree?

A. According to Dr. Jackson, he would have used them on his web site.

Q. And how is that disruptive, intimidating and frightening?

A. He doesn't say.

Q. Well why do you believe it was disruptive intimidating and frightening as you state in paragraph five of your affidavit? Would you like to look at paragraph five of your affidavit?

A. I probably should (looks at document). It does not specify nor can I understand from the context why it would be, but it was used as an example of things that they describe as my word is chilling.

Q. And how is that chilling, to use your word?

A. I think it is important to have open exchange of ideas in a department.

Q. I agree. Absolutely.

A. I think that if people feel that their ideas or opinions are going to be used against them in some way that that would have a chilling effect.

Q. And what did Dr. Depree do to make people feel that their opinions would be used against them to use your word?

A. I don't know.

Q. You have no evidence at all that he did anything?

A. I don't know that, correct.

Again, President Saunders doesn't have any evidence to support her punitive action against a tenured professor. At this point in our revelation of her decision-making habits, does President Saunders have any evidence for any of her decisions? The answer is no.

And here is a question that Dr. Saunders didn't bother to consider, how does a rank and file professor have access to all emails on the USM network? The answer is, the claim is stupid on its face. However, that didn't matter. Dr. DePree's colleagues couldn't tolerate differences of opinion. They wanted Dr. DePree silenced. Dr. Saunders was not going to let nonsensical and false claims get in her way.

When she decides that she wants to remove you from your classroom with a view toward taking your hard earned tenure, what evidence will she have? How will you know unless she is required to answer questions under oath? Of course, she is probably betting that in most cases she won't have to answer questions or defend her behavior.

## Part 12

Q. Let's go on, and tell me what else you considered as describing disruptive, intimidating and frightening behavior by Dr. Depree?

A. (Saunders looks at document.) Again, there's a reference to disruptive behavior.

Q. What specifically?

A. [Interim Director] Dr. Jackson said: I feel uncomfortable when I'm on the Hattiesburg campus and actually am concerned for my safety.

Q. What specifically does he describe?

A. He's describing a behavior at a spring [May 2007] faculty meeting.

Q. Okay?

A. As one of the most frightening experiences of his academic life.

Q. What did the independent ombudsman have to say about that meeting?

A. Let me go back to that (Saunders looks at document again).

Q. I believe it's about one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight -- about eight lines down in paragraph four.

A. (Saunders looks at document.) Well, he said that a short heated exchange occurred and he [DePree] left in the room in an abrupt fashion. While his behavior was not appropriate I cannot say I find it frightening having witnessed similar or worse behavior numerous times during my tenure at USM. Is that what you're asking?

Q. Yes, that's what I'm asking. So he was not able to confirm any particularly frightening behavior by Dr. Depree?

A. Well, I think he said that that was described to him.

Q. Yes.

A. And I think his perception was what I just read to you, that he's seen worse.

Q. So did you rely on Dr. Cannon's perception or Dr. Jackson's?

A. Well by the time Dr. Cannon had written this, I had already taken action.

Q. Okay. But you could un-take it couldn't you?

A. I could.

Q. You have not.

A. I have not.

A series of reports on Interim Director Jackson (among others) will begin at the culmination of the series drawn from President Saunders' April 2010 deposition. Relevant to this series is to ask if Interim Director Jackson hid under his desk quivering in fear at the May 2007 faculty meeting when Sami Dakhli and several faculty insisted that Professor DePree shut down usmnews.net? No. Jackson was not hiding in fear under his seat nor did he run from the room for his life. In fact, he sat calmly smiling as he witnessed the attack on Professor DePree and usmnews.net.

However, Dr. Saunders did not ask that fundamental question. When it became clear that no facts supported the specious claims found in the letters she nevertheless continued down the path of terminating Dr. DePree's tenure and employment. When you think about Dr. Saunders' failure to comply with University procedures or to act in accordance with fact, remember it could happen to you. What is your hard earned tenure worth when you cannot rely on the president of the University to honor either the letter or the spirit of the law and facts?

### **Part 13**

Q. Could you meet with Dr. Depree any time you wanted to as his supervisor?

A. I'm not his supervisor.

Q. Dr. Saunders, I think when we started this you testified that you were in charge of personnel academics?

A. I have overarching responsibilities.

Q. But you could have talked to Dr. Depree?

A. I could have.

Q. You could talk to him anytime you want to?

A. I could.

Q. Have you?

A. No.

Other presidents at USM have taken the time to talk to Professor DePree. For example, when the accounting faculty secretly petitioned a previous USM president to fire Professor DePree, the then president asked to talk to him face-to-face. The event prompting the secret petition was the unforgivable act of questioning petty corruption in the School of Accountancy. Jim Crockett, then Director, School of Accountancy, had set himself up to get the Morgan Professorship. Professor DePree didn't know it when he nominated a junior faculty member for the professorship – a junior faculty who had already hit many of the best academic and professional journals. Professor DePree advocated rewarding a promising young academic to help advance the School of Accountancy. Furious, Dr. Crockett handed the nomination back to Dr. DePree [the rules required the nominations be submitted to the Director]. He said to Professor DePree, "Don't you understand, I'm supposed to get the Morgan Professorship next."

Professor DePree challenged Dr. Crockett's conflict of interest-- collecting nominations, naming the members of the committee that selected the Morgan Professor, and excluding nominations except for his own. Needless to say, Dr. Crockett became the next Morgan Professor. It didn't matter that he had never published in any quality professional or academic journal or that he was scheduled for retirement shortly after his stint as Morgan Professor.

The previous president took a little time to talk to Professor DePree. What came of the complaint? That president understood and sympathized with Professor DePree. Dr. Saunders could not be bothered to learn what motivated the current petition to fire DePree or even whether there was any veracity to the claims. Dr. Saunders preferred ignorance. Even after she learned that the claims were false, she insisted on punishing Dr. DePree.

Power and ignorance – wait to see how it will affect your life.

#### **Part 14**

Q. Dr. Saunders, what specific conduct on the part of Dr. Depree is contained in those letters [written by DePree's accusers], not generalizations, specific things he [DePree] has done?

A. Well, let me finish going through them.

Q. Okay.

A. One was that he had access to their emails.

Q. How did he have access to their emails?

A. It didn't say.

Q. Did you ask?

A. I did not.

Q. Do you know of any way that an individual faculty member can access emails when it takes IT to get your calendar?

A. I don't know.

Q. So do you have reason to believe that claim is true?

A. I don't.

Okay, how did Dr. DePree get access to his accusers' emails? Or did he access all faculty members emails, too? Access some, why not all? Anyway, who thinks USM administrators allowed Dr. DePree free and unfettered access to the IT system to monitor faculty emails? They like him so much maybe they allow Dr. DePree access to all USM information, even confidential information?

If you don't believe that, perhaps you believe USM's email system is so insecure, so vulnerable, that it can be accessed by anyone. Give it a try. There may be ways to access emails, but don't ask President Saunders. She doesn't know, but that's not saying much. Based on her testimony, it seems to be a fair conclusion that she doesn't know "nuthin' 'bout nuthin'" and doesn't care to learn nuthin' neither. Nor does she pause to think about how absurd the accusations are. When she was questioned to the point of having to face her failures, and while admitting not a shred of evidence existed, she doggedly continued to act as though she had reason to believe the accusations.

Were this matter not so serious and of such impact on the members of the University community, it would be laughable. However, when she moves to take your hard earned tenure and promotions, it won't be quite so amusing.

## **Part 15**

A. The other specific allegations, which is what I think you asked me, had to do with – they mention disruptive behavior, but the behavior at a spring faculty meeting, and that was one.

Q. Okay. But you have not bothered to listen to the recording of the meeting?



A. I have not.

Q. And you are not relying on the evaluation of the ombudsman?

A. I am.

Q. How are you relying on the evaluation of the ombudsman?

A. Let me find it.

Q. Surely.

A. (Witness looks at document.) The ombudsman -- are you talking about in our current status, let's say?

Q. (Nods head affirmatively.)

A. The ombudsman said that he believed that people were afraid.

Q. And what did Dr. Depree do to make them afraid? Does he say?

A. He mentions -- he said the most serious accusation is that of creating a fearful and hostile environment.

Q. What evidence did he find for that?

A. He says: When asked directly, he could not get a direct answer. He summarized by saying that he feels that the fear was genuine. Whether it was valid or not, he was not equipped to say.

Q. So you discipline people for claims for which you have no evidence?

A. I have evidence that they were fear.

Q. And that is -- how is that Dr. Depree's fault?

A. I don't know that it is.

Here's the perfect accusation. Accuse someone of being a danger. Without a shred of evidence, a leader immediately exiles the accused, punishes him/her, too. Then, that same leader persists in punishing the accused after three years when she does not have a shred of evidence to support the accusations. In fact, all of the evidence says the accusations are false. Add to that, while there is a threat that as many as a hundred faculty will be terminated due to budget constraints, she spends millions of dollars in public money to carry out the vendetta of a few faculty members.

Would this be the only unwise behavior to expect from such a leader?

### **Part 16**

Q. Are there any other specific allegations of acts that Dr. Depree has undertaken to make people fearful?

A. (Saunders looks at document.) There is -- and this is from Dr. Posey -- Eruptions over the years.

Q. Does he describe any specific events?

A. He does. The lock on the departmental safe was broken, and he was told that Dr. Depree had broken it.

Q. Do you have any evidence that Dr. Depree actually broke it?

A. No.

Q. And did Dr. Posey have any evidence that Dr. Depree broke it?

A. He doesn't say here.

Q. He just says "he heard?"

A. And then --

Q. No. Is my characterization correct, Dr. Saunders?

A. He said: When I asked what had happened, I was told by Jerry King that Mark had broken it.

Q. Did you talk to Jerry King?

A. No.

Q. Do you know where that information came from?

A. Well, it came to me from Rod Posey who said he got it from Jerry King.

Q. Did you ask Dr. Posey?

A. No. Do you want me to go on?

Q. Yes, please do.

A. He also says: Mark broke the thermostat in the accounting offices.

Q. Do you have any evidence for that?

A. Well, in Dr. Posey's letter, he said that Mark told him he was cold and someone needed to do something about it.

Q. And how would breaking the thermostat do something about it?

A. I don't know.

Q. Does he say that Dr. Depree told him he broke the thermostat?

A. Not specifically, no.

Q. Continue.

A. And that he [DePree] has increased his verbal abuse against people.

Q. What has Dr. Depree done according to Dr. Posey increasing his level of verbal abuse?

A. He doesn't say.

Q. Did you ask?

A. No.

Q. Did you rely on this letter?

A. I did.

Q. Do you know if there are any reprimands or disciplinary action against Dr. Depree for any of these claims?

A. I don't know.

Q. Have you looked at his personnel file?

A. I have not. I looked at his file at the last deposition because I was asked to get the file that the president's office had. If there are others, I have not seen them.

Q. Have you asked to see them?

A. No.

Q. Do you have any reason to believe that there is any disciplinary action taken against Dr. Depree for any of these allegations?

A. I don't.

Q. Did you ask for the human resources personnel file concerning Dr. Depree?

A. No.

Q. Could you have?

A. Yes.

Q. Any reason you did not?

A. No.

President Saunders, does Shirley Sherrod remind you of anything close to home? The accusations against Ms. Sherrod were corrected in a few days because leaders were concerned enough about the facts to correct their rush to judgment. You have had three years, with the clock still running, and you refuse to correct your decisions.

Dr. Hank Bounds and IHL members, does Shirley Sherrod remind you of anything closer to home? You have participated in the same mistaken decisions based on a failure to gather facts. Why don't you act responsibly?